

Russell Kelfer

Forbidden Fruit

#1121-A

Series: Making the Spiritual Switch



DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

Forbidden Fruit

Picture this. The most exclusive restaurant in town is having a holiday buffet. You know what a buffet is like; it's a sophisticated *license to gorge*. It is *cultured gluttony*. It is a cafeteria line with the *price tags removed*. There you stand. A meticulously pressed linen tablecloth covers the antique oak table, but no one notices the linen *or* the table, for unashamedly staring you in the face is a gourmet spread that would have been fit for a Roman emperor.

Seven kinds of meat and chicken beckon you. Mouthwatering prime rib, its natural gravy glistening in the candlelight, has been cooked just the way you like it—pink enough to taste moist but cooked well enough for you to be sure it's not still alive. The roasted chicken has been slowly cooked over mesquite coals until its juices seem to shout to you, "Take me, I'm yours." A full, delectable platter of shrimp, each one big enough to be a meal in itself, lies next to a bowl of red sauce singing, "Made for each other." Close by is a table of veggies so colorful *Good Housekeeping* could use them for a cover. And not too far away is another table tastefully laden with an assortment of chocolate desserts and other gooey delights so sinful it would send the healthiest of souls into a sugar fit. And there you stand, a total of forty two choices staring back at you, and you can have *all* of them if you so choose.

But then you notice behind you in line, of all people, your doctor. What a place to meet your doctor. Now, if he were in front of you in line, you could justify what you eat based on *his* gluttony, but he's behind you, so the ball is in your court.

"Oh, well, Doc," you mumble sheepishly, "we only live once."

The good doctor, knowing he isn't going to change your eating habits at this point, ignores the opportunity for a lecture and just quietly responds, "Eat your heart out, but *don't touch the apple pie*. Remember, you're allergic to apples, and I don't want to make a trip to the emergency room tonight."

"Oh, yeah, thanks, Doc," you murmur, relieved that he didn't

Forbidden Fruit

start mentioning cholesterol or something heavy. A giant load has been lifted from your shoulders.

Now with your new-found freedom staring you in the face, you peruse the desert table once again. Suddenly everything becomes a blur except the apple pie. In fact, *the only thing you can see is the apple pie*. You want apple pie. Forget succulent chocolate eclairs. Who cares about strawberry shortcake a la mode? You want apple pie. Even the roast beef has now become incidental. The fried zucchini casserole that was once so attractive no longer has any particular appeal. Your tastebuds are now crying out for only one thing: apple pie. Why? Because you've been told you can't have it, that's why! Forbidden fruit captivates the mind. It tantalizes you, disturbs you, angers you. All of that other food is yours, but all you want is the one thing you can't have. Your argument is, "Why would God plant apple trees if He didn't want me to have apple pie?"

Let's look back to Genesis to study the first "tree crisis" recorded in Scripture. Why *did* God make one special tree in the garden? What does that unique tree represent in our spiritual switch? And how does it reflect our attitude toward God, even today?

NOT THE APPLE PIE, EVE

Adam and Eve were back from their honeymoon. Adam was out in the field tending to the watering and picking a bouquet of flowers for Eve for their anniversary dinner. Eve had the house clean, dinner in the oven, and a bit of free time on her hands. She thought about meditating on the things God had told them, but she decided instead to do a little investigating in the garden to see if there was anything going on she had missed.

She was between the rose garden and the orange groves when she heard a strange hissing sound at her feet. "Pssst, Eve," she heard. "What's happening, Eve? What's going on with you, Sister?"

The voice seemed friendly enough, so she looked down. Sitting on a rock, staring up at her with eyes so innocent you'd think they belonged to a one year old, was an extremely friendly animal called a "serpent".

Startled, she thought for a moment, and then answered the little animal's question. "I was just out for a walk to see what's

Forbidden Fruit

going on in the garden. It's so beautiful out here, you know. Isn't God wonderful?"

"Amen!" the snake replied in his most spiritual voice. "Hallelujah! God is good."

"Yes, He is," Eve replied, becoming more drawn to her new friend, seeing that he, too, was interested in spiritual things. "Yes, He is. Just look at all those beautiful trees. So many different kinds and sizes."

"Oh, yes," the little critter answered, "*but is it true that you can't touch that beautiful one over there?*"

"Well," Eve responded somewhat defensively, "that's for my own protection. God said that if we eat of that tree, we'll die."

"Did God say that?" the snake asked doubtfully. "Are you absolutely sure?"

Eve began to feel a bit uncomfortable. She had been right there in the garden when God had spoken to Adam about that one tree. "Any tree you see is yours," God had said, "except that one. Eat of it and you shall surely die." She remembered as if it were yesterday. She and Adam had enjoyed the fruit of every other tree in the garden but had carefully avoided that one - up until now, that is.

There was a kind of awkward silence. It was as though Satan just wanted Eve to have a moment to think about how ludicrous it was for a loving God to limit what His creation could do. The inference was that, "If that tree wasn't good for you, why would God have planted it? Surely, He wasn't trying to trick you. Or was He?"

Eve sheepishly reaffirmed her conversation with God. "Every tree but that one," He had said, "or you'll die."

"What nonsense!" the suddenly brash little animal responded. "You will not surely die! Your God is just keeping the best from you because if you eat of that tree you'll be as smart as He is. Then you won't need anyone to tell you what to do, and He'll be out of a job."

"But that's forbidden fruit," Eve responded doubtfully.

"Forbidden fruit is the sweetest and tastiest of all," Satan answered, and in a moment, he was gone. Eve was at the buffet table of life, and now all she could see was one thing. "Not the

Forbidden Fruit

apple pie, Eve,” you could almost hear God saying, but by this time the “apple pie” was the only thing she had on her mind.

Eve could hear Adam’s footsteps in the distance, and while she waited for him to arrive, she pondered what her newfound friend had told her. She walked closer to that one tree. She had never been *this* close before, and sure enough, the closer she came the prettier the tree looked. Its leaves were even greener than the other trees. Its fruit looked so gorgeous you’d think just one bite would satisfy for a lifetime. It was pleasant to the eye, good for food, and *what harm could come from one little taste?*

Eve looked about like a detective to see if God was around. He was nowhere in sight. With one sweeping motion, almost as though it were just meant to be, she reached out and took a piece of the fruit of that forbidden tree. Without so much as a moment’s thought to her fate, she bit into the luscious looking morsel and ate. Suddenly there was a feeling of power and satisfaction she had not felt before.

Just at that time, Adam came around the bend and saw what had happened; but before he could so much as protest, Eve handed the world’s first forbidden fruit salad to her hapless hubby and, seeing that she had eaten it and was still around to talk about it, he took a bite as well.

Talk about severe allergies. Suddenly they experienced symptoms they had never felt before. Guilt. Depression. Fear. Embarrassment. They had just eaten something far better than a Baskin Robbins double dip cone, and now they felt sick inside, all alone, and strangely uncomfortable.

The last person they wanted to see was God. Until this, they longed to hear His voice as He walked through the garden. Now, when they heard His footsteps and heard His voice, they were filled with panic. They ran and hid, afraid for their lives. All at once they found themselves hiding from their best friend. They didn’t understand it at the time, but they were suffering from the most deadly disease known to man: the disease of sin.

A GOD OF LOVE AND LIMITS

Two questions immediately arise as we begin to ponder the devastation caused on planet earth as a result of this one basic decision involving a tree:

1- Why did God plant such a beautiful tree, give it such

Forbidden Fruit

appealing fruit, place it so strategically in the midst of the garden, but tell man not to touch it?

2- Why did God use a tree? Why was it the symbol of man's obedience and portrait of God's salvation wrapped up in a creation of His that was planted in the ground, had branches reaching to the sky, and bore fruit - a certain kind of fruit that no other tree possessed? Why a tree? And why *this* tree?

The answers to these questions unlock a treasure house of insight into God's plan for man and give us a living picture book to be found growing in every city, magnified ten fold in every field beside every highway, and illuminated to its maximum in every forest in the world. In other words, every time we see a tree, there are certain truths that ought to be emblazoned on our consciousness about the nature of God and the nature of man. At the sight of their majesty we should make the spiritual switch and stop to worship.

The first question is answered as we examine the nature of God and His purposes in creation. The nature of God indicates, first of all, that He is supreme; all of creation was designed to bow in humble adoration before Him.

He is to be adored, not because He needs it— He needs nothing to be complete— but because *we need it*. Nothing created exists for itself. The computer, probably man's most amazing invention to date, is measured in its effectiveness not by what it can do for itself, but rather by what it can do to serve its creator. For a computer's purpose to be fulfilled, it must continually be meeting the needs of its creator or the one its creator designed it to serve. If you don't believe it, take one of the little beasts, set it out in the desert with no electricity and no software with no one to operate it, and see how "fulfilled" it is. It is indeed a supreme expression of man's creativity, but only to the degree to which it serves its creator. When it ceases to do that, it begins to have a mind of its own, trashing documents at will, operating only when it feels like it, designing its own screens to best flatter itself. It is then really good for nothing. The creation has its fulfillment only in the mirroring of the will of the creator.

That's what God meant when He created man in His own image. An image is nothing more than a reflection of the original. Anytime it ceases to reflect *perfectly* what it is supposed to reflect, it ceases to be an image. It has rebelled. If you look in the mirror

Forbidden Fruit

and raise your hand but your image does not raise its hand, then it's not your image! In fact, if I were you, I'd consider running the other way.

Man was created for the primary purpose of reflecting the image of God; but *if man is to reflect a God who has a will, then man must be given that same capability*. God, having made the animals to inhabit the earth, made man to have dominion over the earth, giving him the power to do so by giving him a living soul. That soul, made in the image of God, included the ability to choose.

Now, since God gave man the capacity to choose, He had also to give him choices. To do otherwise would have been to have made a computer with no software: it would be an interesting paperweight, perhaps, but without other purpose. And if you think about it, God actually made the choices minimal in such a way it shouldn't have been too hard to do it right. He gave Adam and Eve thousands of fruit bearing trees from which to eat and forbade only one of them. The problem now, as well as then, is the lure of forbidden fruit. As soon as man was given the choice not only of *what to do*, but of whether or not *to do what he was told to do*, the problem of forbidden fruit began to surface.

Because of the perfection of His nature, God could not tell Adam or Eve to do anything that would not be for their good. What appeared to be a restriction of their enjoyment was, in fact, an admonition for their protection. Enter Satan. His goal was to usurp the authority of God by convincing man that he was his own god. The obvious place to begin was at the point of the forbidden fruit. Unless God set limits on man, man could not function in the image of God. Unless there were choices, man could not reflect the nature of God, and man could not choose to obey the Word of God. Therefore, there existed one tree that man was not supposed to touch.

Why was that? Because that one tree was the tree whose fruit gave man the potential to decide for himself what was, and what was not, good. Satan had set the stage for a scenario that would, in effect, cause the fall of man. Listen to his argument and the results which followed found in Genesis 3,

And the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Forbidden Fruit

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. (Genesis 3:4-6)

“You will be *like* God, knowing good and evil.” That was Satan’s assertion to Eve. Usually there is *some truth* in what Satan tells you. That’s why he loves to use Scriptures, but he uses them wrongfully, as he did with Jesus in the wilderness. The truth was, “when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and, *like God, you will know good and evil.*” What he said was true; *how he said it was a lie.* He implied that God’s motives weren’t pure; that a loving, Holy God was simply keeping the best from His children. The truth was that man had been given a far better program: he was to take God at His Word, and God, who is good, would protect him from evil. God’s plan then and God’s plan now is not for man to experience evil that he might better appreciate good. That’s a lie of Satan. We are to flee the very appearance of evil. We don’t need to taste it to hate it. To taste evil is to love it, and to thus destroy your fellowship with a Holy God.

Don’t let your children sell you that lie, either. They don’t need to “experience” the world to witness to the world. Evil corrupts. God did not want His children to taste that corruption.

THE PROBLEM WITH KNOWING

Having tasted of evil for the first time, man experienced for the first time what guilt was all about. God’s best friends ran and hid from Him. God found them (He loved them enough to search for them until He did), and when He asked why they were running, they said, “because we were naked.”

“Who told you that you were naked,” God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” The rest is history. Adam said, “Big, bad Eve forced me to eat.” Eve responded, “The devil made me do it.” And man has been passing the buck ever since.

Having tasted the forbidden fruit, Adam now understood that there was another choice in life besides fellowship with God. There is that initial freedom when man first learns that *he doesn’t have to obey God*, that he can, in essence, be his own god.

Forbidden Fruit

However, that freedom is followed by the bondage of loneliness, emptiness, embarrassment, fear, and hopelessness accompanied by the realization that once he chose to disobey God, he became responsible for *all the things God was responsible for before the fall*, and he was not equipped. That's why God told him to leave that tree alone.

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Now let's zero in on Satan's tactics. The story he used was, "Nobody has the right to tell you what you can or can't do." The method he used was to focus their attention on the few things that were forbidden and to tantalize their minds with their attraction to the flesh: good for food, pleasant to the eyes, good to make them wise. As John would later define them,

the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye; and the pride of life...
these things are not of the Father, but are of the world, and
the world is passing away, along with the lust thereof.

(I John 2:16,17)

Satan's tactics haven't changed through the generations, simply because the nature of man hasn't changed. He is not particularly resourceful, but he doesn't have to be. You and I still crave forbidden fruit. As you think of the scenario in the garden again, think about the really big mistakes in your own life. You saw something the world said was acceptable but that God said was sin. Your conscience said "no". Suddenly, a little voice within you quietly whispered, "Did God *really* say that? Did He say 'not ever?' Is God keeping something from me?" Your mind became preoccupied with what it would be like to do whatever it was you were not supposed to do.

Maybe you just toyed with the idea. You didn't really plan to get involved; you just wanted to get closer to see what it was like, that thing God was keeping from you. And sure enough, the closer you got, the more harmless and desirable it seemed. It looked so good. And *everybody else was doing it and getting away with it*. So you lingered. You thought about what it would be like to taste that forbidden fruit. The longer you lingered, the closer you came, and the more tempting it became. As your mind entertained it, God didn't "zap" you, so you reasoned, "*Did God really say it was always wrong?*" At last, all sense of caution and reason was gone, and you reached out in a moment of passion or a moment of weariness or a moment of discouragement or a

Forbidden Fruit

moment of rejection and took that one thing you were clearly told never to touch.

At first it wasn't all that bad. You saw why the world delights in the things God condemns: pleasant to the sight, good to satisfy, makes you worldly-wise. Now you knew; you had experienced the thing for yourself.

Next? You sought out the company of others whose gardens of life included the same kind of trees. You encouraged other Christians who were going through the same struggles to taste as you had. Rebellion loves company. That's why so many who are tempted to break up their homes find companionship with other believers who have already done the same despicable things. Often they will taste the same fruit because they've wanted to do so all along and were just waiting to see someone else do it and survive.

Perhaps you really thought you had survived unscathed. But unknown to you at the time, *when you tasted, something inside of you died*. A measure of sweetness you experienced in the presence of God diminished; a measure of the wisdom you possessed in the things of God ceased to exist. Yes, you ate, and yes, you're still alive to talk about it, but you are not the same. The possible consequences of your eating that one piece of forbidden fruit are endless. Like Adam's sin, the ripples on the ocean of life that flow into the boundless waters of eternity move quietly into life after life after life, especially if the sin becomes public knowledge. Those whose concept of God was strengthened by your life become crushed, discouraged, and broken. Those you personally hurt lie on the ash heaps of life, disillusioned and often doubting God as well as doubting you.

You've had your forbidden fruit. For a moment, the taste was exhilarating, but later the after-taste takes its toll. The sweet turns to bitter. You pretend it never happened, but your eyes have been opened to new areas of sin, and you wonder if it can ever be like it was before. You tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and another veil has been lifted unnecessarily from the eyes of your understanding, destroying the holiness that surrounded you before.

EVERY TIME YOU SEE A TREE

Without exception, Beloved, *it wasn't worth it. It never will*

Forbidden Fruit

be. The wages of sin will always be death—not annihilation, but separation. Those wages will always separate you from fellowship with God. You may have violated one of God’s laws of morality, or one of God’s laws of holiness and purity, or one of God’s laws of marriage, or one of God’s laws of stewardship. Maybe you tasted of the cup of rebellion to authority and demanded your own way. You knew better, but the lure of forbidden fruit called to you, and before long, you no longer saw all the joys of heaven on the trees of life that were yours for the taking. You saw only that one tree, and all you heard was Satan’s taunting voice, “Did God say that?”

Perhaps you are right now toying with tasting forbidden fruit. Whether it’s only a drama going on in your mind or you are acting it out on the stage of life, you are playing with a fire that always burns. Always. And your God has lovingly, gently given you a landscape full of reminders to keep you from making the mistake. He has taken the paintbrush of eternity and with bold strokes has drawn upon the canvas of your vision a world full of trees—trees He designed to remind you and me of the disastrous consequences of forbidden fruit. When you are tempted to taste of some of life’s “no-nos”, take a good look at the trees around you and remember the consequences they represent.

If you have already eaten some of the forbidden fruit, you need not despair, for there is something else to consider. Apart from the grace of God, the story of Adam and Eve in the garden would end on a hopeless note. But for the Christian, the Scriptures also give us I John 1:9,

If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The Father, whose mercies are new every morning, is a God, not just of second chances, but of many chances. He extends those new mercies to those who repent and come to Him for cleansing, but often times, as with King David, the consequences are not removed but must be endured for a lifetime. We take heart because a man with such a sin history as David could still be called a man after God’s own heart, but that is not a license to deliberately choose sin, counting for rescue on repeating some magic words spoken the next time you meet God in your garden. Words alone do not constitute confession; forgiveness and restoration are matters of the heart. God looks upon the heart, and he is never fooled. We have no motivations not clear to Him. But just as a wilted, drooping plant revives with fresh water, we

Forbidden Fruit

also can be revived by our merciful Father.

Whether you bow before a holy God asking Him to deliver you from temptation or find yourself prostrate before Him pleading for forgiveness, recall the message of the tree. It's a fresh reminder from the picture book of heaven of the powerful consequences of partaking of forbidden fruit.

A Challenge to Further Study and Application

1- Reread Genesis 3:1-6 very carefully. What do you think it means that "the serpent was more subtle (or cunning) than any beast of the field that God had made"? Was does the word subtle mean?

2- What do you think is the significance of the phrase "nor shall you touch it" in verse 3?

3- Compare verse 6 with I John 2:16. What do you find?

4- Read I Timothy 2:8-15. Compare it with Genesis 3:1-6. Why do you think Paul said what he did?

5- Why do you think "forbidden fruit" is so desirable?

6- Can you think of two things in your life that Satan uses to lure you into disobedience? Replay Eve's scenario once more. Satan's tactics haven't really changed, have they?

7- Why do you think Satan approaches each of us differently? What three categories of sin seem to cover the whole spectrum of temptation? Have you ever looked at the things that tempt you in the light of those three categories?

8- Read James 1:12-16. How does this explain what part of the process is ours, what part is Satan's, and what part is God's? At what point do you think Eve made her first big mistake? How can you apply that to your own life? How had God equipped her to resist the devil? How has He equipped you?

Memorize: James 1:13-15

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230

210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer